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THE SOCIAL BASIS OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION.

It must not be thought that by the advocacy of any one political reform—as that of proportional representation—one means to assert that the adoption of that reform measure would cure the ills of our political society. Society is too complex for that; but as society changes under the influence of changing times, it behooves us to see that it grows better instead of worse. Hence, we are bound to advocate any and every reform that will do good. Now a system of proportional representation, *i. e.*, a system by which each political party would secure representation in proportion to its numbers, while it would not remove all our political troubles, would still do much good.

The study of politics rests largely upon careful observation and knowledge of human motives. The most successful statesman is he who applies this knowledge best.

To be practical in the discussion of social questions, if one looks for immediate results by the way of political action, one must assume that human motives, in the main, are practically unchanging. To-day men act from the same motives as fifty years ago; after fifty years have passed their motives will remain still the same, though there will often be changes in the manifestation of these motives. Great reformers like Buddha or Christ, it may be, can put the leaven of a new life into the world and look for the results to a change of men's natures in forthcoming centuries. But it is not practical for political reformers seeking immediate results to trust to a remodeling of human nature. The problem that confronts them is how to organize the political forces of to-day so as to make the present social motives benefit society. "No man can escape the spirit of the age,

or do much good except as its servant, but he can be its intelligent servant and not its slave."

The motives which at present affect political action in ordinary times are practically, as a whole, egoistic, despite many individual exceptions. In times of national danger, nearly all men become patriotic and are willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of the state. But in times of peace men's motives in their political action are practically the same as those that influence their business action. When their own personal interests are not clearly at stake, and this is possibly true in the majority of cases, they are likely to vote from habit, or from a partially unconscious desire to please those whom they meet in social life. It is less trouble for them to do so, and so their self-interest directs. The men who carefully think out the issues of the day before each election and vote accordingly for the good of the state are few.

By the state we mean, speaking broadly, society organized to rule itself, by force, if need be. In this respect the State differs from other social organizations, as the Church. All government implies rule by force, and the circumstances of life make it evident that the rulers of society must be few. Every person enjoys directing others; no one likes to be dominated. In consequence, there is always a conflict for the ruling place between different individuals and different classes made up of those with common interests in society, and the strongest win. The source of strength is sometimes, as in the rude tribes of an early stage of society, physical. The man with the greatest brute strength and skill becomes the ruler. Craft also in early societies is a prominent source of strength, and determines the ruler. Often in undeveloped societies the man whose cunning enables him to play best upon the superstitious fears of his fellows, upon their untrained religious instincts, in this way proves himself the strongest and becomes, as priest, the ruler. Or the same priestly power may rule without

deception by making use of the same motives in human nature. Ordinarily as industrial society develops, the power of arms goes with accumulations of capital, and the wealthy make themselves the rulers, and direct the state in their own interests. In modern democracies, in theory, it is assumed that the majority rules. There is no longer, in theory, a contest for the ruling place between the wealthy and the poor, the strong and the weak; but there is in theory a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, and we forget that a ruling majority implies a ruled minority.

As a matter of fact, however, in our modern democracies it is ordinarily not the majority which rules, whatever our terminology may imply; but our democratic systems give us still a ruling minority determining the actions of the majority. Our political managers assume that voters ordinarily seek their own interests. They seek to build up their parties on the principle of the Greek statesman, who asserted that political parties might be based upon either principles or interests, but that it was much safer to found them upon interests. Yet the political managers themselves when in power, acting for themselves and for their parties, and betraying the interests of the majority, have so arranged our political machinery that it invariably gives unfair power to one political party at the expense of the other. Under our plurality system of election in representative districts, and, especially through the influence of the gerrymander, we reach results that are far from just.

The Republican party, whose congressional representation passed the McKinley bill, cast less than a majority of the popular vote. The Democratic party, with its overwhelming majority in the House of Representatives to pass the Wilson bill, still failed to give a majority of the votes cast to the Democrats.

With 47.2 per cent only of the popular vote they secured 59.8 per cent of the Representatives; whereas the Republicans, with 41.9 per cent of the total vote, secured only 36.8

per cent of the Representatives. The 8.7 per cent of the Populists obtained 3.4 per cent of the representation, while the Prohibitionists' 2 per cent secured nothing. The last election in the fall of 1894, that may be considered even more of a tidal wave than that of 1892, was still not great enough to give the winning party a majority of the popular votes cast. The Republicans with 48.1 per cent only of the total vote secured 68.8 per cent of the Representatives, while the Democrats with 31.1 per cent of the vote have secured 29.2 per cent of the Representatives; the 12 per cent of the Populists has obtained 2 per cent of the Representatives, while the 1.6 per cent of the Prohibitionists secured nothing.

The House whose term has just expired numbered 131 Republican Congressmen, 213 Democratic Congressmen and 12 Populist Congressmen. A fair representation by the numbers of the votes cast would have given to the Republicans 147 Representatives, to the Democrats 168, to the Populists 31, to the Prohibitionists 8. The House elected to meet next December contains 245 Republicans, 104 Democrats, and 7 Populists. A division in proportion to the popular vote would give to the Republicans 171 members, to the Democrats 136, to the Populists 43, to the Prohibitionists 6.

Gerrymanders in the different States give us results no less striking. The State of New York in the incoming Congress will have 29 Republican and 5 Democratic members. A proportional division of the popular vote would give to the Republicans 19, to the Democrats 14, to the Populists 1. The overwhelming Republican vote in Michigan, that gave to the Republicans 12 members of Congress, to the Democrats none, and that in the State Legislature has given both Houses to the Republicans with the exception of one lone Democrat in the lower House, obtained in some way an unfair advantage. A proportional representation of the Congressmen would have given the Republicans 7, the Democrats 4, the Populists 1. So, too, Pennsylvania, with its 28

Republican and 2 Democratic Congressmen, should divide its congressional representation so as to give the Republicans 18, the Democrats 11, the Prohibitionists 1.

The real representation, however, is still further from the proportion laid down in our political theories than these figures would seem to imply. No one pretends that if there is any conflict of interest the majority is to take into account in any way the interests of the minority. If a party carries a State by but an even vote plus one, the minority, large as it is, is entirely disregarded on all questions affecting party. Laws passed under caucus action may often be carried by those who represent little over one-quarter of the voters, or even less than that.

But the conflict between the social and industrial classes for this ruling power appears in still another way. Not merely is it true that where there are more than two political parties often a comparatively small minority of the whole people may receive the total representation and direct the power of the government against the wishes of the majority; but it is still further true that this minority is generally made up of the same classes in the population, or of those who represent the interests of certain classes. Ordinarily the wealthy secure the representation, either directly or indirectly. In many cases the cost of nominations and elections is so great that only well-to-do or wealthy men can stand as candidates; this is especially true in England. If poor men will for any reason in the minds of the politicians make better candidates, they still of necessity fall under obligations to the rich for furnishing the means to carry the elections. Men who have been long in political life as professional politicians naturally secure their nominations and elections by serving their party, and party managers know that it is largely to the well-to-do and the wealthy that they must look for their campaign funds and for their campaign influence. Votes are secured, not merely at times by buying up the votes of the poor, but

more frequently still by raising false issues that the ignorant cannot see and by leading them to believe that they are serving their own interests when they are, in fact, serving the interests of their masters, the wealthy minority. Legislation in most civilized countries for centuries past has shown that in the main it is the rich that have ruled, and that they have ruled in their own interests though this is probably less true here than elsewhere. Even when the rich or their representatives are conscientiously trying to do their duty by society as a whole, it is practically impossible for them so to act. No man can see the interests of others, especially of those far removed from him in social situation, so well as he can see his own interests, and those of his class.

In spite of the large amount of labor legislation passed within the last few years, one may still cite the tax system of the United States Government, the tax systems of many of our States, as they in practice work, for the personal property tax is regularly evaded, and the legislation favorable to great corporations, as proofs of the assertions made.

Frank men who have been influential in legislation do not hesitate to say that the intelligent have always hoodwinked the ignorant, and always will do so. Even when, as of late in New York City, the government was made up apparently of the ignorant and perhaps of those who could not be called the wealthy classes in the community, the same selfish motive led the wealthy corporations to buy their legislation and immunity from plunder from the local government, and thus still to make it true that the government was in the interests and managed in the interests of the wealthy as against the poor.

It little becomes any of us, too, to single out New York for especial attack. In Philadelphia it is said by one of Philadelphia's citizens that even at the present day in the City Council one may see the "lobbyist of a great corporation openly directing the course of legislation, and all amendments in the interest of the public voted down without

serious consideration. That city is in a dangerous state whose ports and strongholds are in the hands of forces alien to her interests."

And yet this perversion of the simplest principles of democratic government does not arouse the indignation that we should expect from most of our citizens. Many of them, and those the best, fear the rule of the majority. They speak of popular government, but they really wish to exclude, sometimes the foreign vote, always the ignorant, and what amounts to practically the same thing in many cases, the vote of the poor. If this can not be excluded so as to give us legally the rule of a comparatively speaking small number of the well-to-do and intelligent, they are willing to wink at the deceits practiced to deprive the more ignorant classes of their real voluntary representation. If one may judge, however, from the signs of the times, from the increasing power of organization shown by the poor, and the rapidity with which they are coming into prominence as political factors, one may expect to see in a comparatively short time the real rule of the majority.

Can we trust this majority when it comes into power, or does their rule mean, as so many fear, the plunder of the wealthy and the rule of injustice? The question is a fundamental one. It means, Is democracy possible? If negatived, we must either, under a pretended democratic form of government, continue the rule of an oligarchy, or we must expect a social revolution that will lead us, we know not whither. Can we trust the real majority?

It is beyond question true that the average voter is incompetent to settle many of the complicated questions of government that arise to-day. The discussions over the banking system, the tariff, foreign loans, etc., show that even our best-informed, most intelligent citizens, have more than they can do to agree upon a safe and beneficial policy. If they fail to agree, or if they fail even to unite into parties with distinct opinions on such subjects, what can we expect

of the more ignorant majority? Mr. Gladstone well said, in arguing against Mr. Lowe for the extension of the suffrage: "It is written in legible characters with a pen of iron upon the rock of human destiny that within the domain of practical politics the people must, in the main, be passive." "Never can the average man be reasonably called upon to think out measures for himself, in all their baffling detail." But they may still perhaps be able to choose wisely some one to do their work for them. All business men employ experts—lawyers, chemists, physicians. Why not employ trained statesmen?

What are the essential qualifications for citizenship in a democracy? There is needed in the first place as Mr. Maccunn has said, "A sense of the prime importance of permanent elements of national well-being," such as personal security, property, reputation, free speech, toleration, education, decency of life, national honor. This does not require much intelligence, and this sense most men, even the ignorant ones, have. Again the average citizen needs a public spirit that will lead him to prefer the interests of the state, of the many, to his own. This qualification is one that certainly cannot be expected in ordinary times of any great class of citizens, but it is a spirit that we shall probably find as common in the ignorant and poorer classes as among the wealthy and educated. Those who work most among the poor are often touched by the unselfish readiness with which they give the little that they have to those still more in need. And, as regards their actions in political matters, there can be no better witness than Mr. Gladstone, who says: "A long experience impresses me with the belief that this evil temper (that of selfishness) does not grow in intensity as we move downward in society from class to class. I rather believe that if a distinction is to be made it must be drawn in favor of, and not against, the classes, if such they must be called, which are lower, larger, less opulent, and, after allowing for trades unions, less organized."

If the average voter has these two qualifications as well as have the rich and intelligent, we may trust him to elect a representative that will serve his interests and those of society best, when, and if, the choice is placed fairly before him in such a way that he can recognize his own interests.

We must trust each class in society to look out chiefly for itself and its own. The strong ought to consider the weak, it may be true, but they will not, and, more than that, cannot. And still further, it is much better, so far as it is possible, for the weaker and more ignorant to look out for themselves. There is no better training in citizenship than the self-reliance that must come from putting the interests of each class into its own hands. We must in some way so modify our political machinery that all social and industrial classes shall get a fair representation in our legislative bodies, and that fair representation can be best secured by so arranging our political machinery that each class shall cast votes in proportion to its numbers, with the conscious knowledge that it is voting as a class and for its own class interests.

We must keep it in mind that we are seeking not a temporary good, but a permanent policy. The needs of the times, the needs of different classes are continually shifting, and the measures to be advocated are ever new ones. We must expect that in the effort to meet so complex needs, many mistakes will be made; but only the acts that tend toward the improvement of society will long remain in force. We need in office the men who most clearly see the needs of the day and of the future. Presumably each will see, or at any rate feel—and this feeling is of vital consequence—the needs of his own class best. For the good of the state the classes must patriotically compromise.

It may be said in opposition to this that the purpose of the state is to secure the good of society and that the recognition of different classes in society, and the putting of them

in conflict one with the other, will wreck the state instead of furthering its purposes.

The purpose of the state is to further the highest good of all (not necessarily the greatest good of the greatest number); and there can be no question that there are different classes in society, whether we will have it so or not, and that they are more or less in conflict. There is no doubt that these classes differ in intelligence, in wealth, in ability, in capacity for enjoyment, in needs. If we attempt to give them all the same gratification, the highest good of all will not be secured. The classes—if, indeed, we can separate society into classes on this basis,—with the greatest intellectual capacity need more to satisfy their wants and for the sake of society should have more than the ignorant classes. The classes with the most refined tastes need more and, for the sake of society, should have more; though all classes and all individuals ought to have a chance to show whether they have these higher powers and tastes. But it is beyond question true that the most intelligent have also more power, and that if they but exert themselves they each will cast more votes than one—their own and those whom they persuade by fair means to act with them. I am not entirely sure that from the standpoint of abstract political justice, if by that we mean the methods by which the good of the state can best be accomplished, we should not give to the intelligent and cultured greater direct voting power than is given to the ignorant, as is the case in Belgium. But so far as our own country is concerned, that is beyond question impossible and undesirable, and we should rather trust to the persuasive power of the intelligent to secure these double votes by showing the less intelligent that their real interests lie in many ways in uniting themselves with the more intelligent.

Classes in society we have and must have, but the classification need not always be the same as it now is. If by our political organization we make it easy for each group in society to organize itself and to cast its vote effectively, new

groupings will take place. At present our political parties are not sharply divided. Our political leaders, to hold them together, are raising false issues, and no man knows where his interests lie. If we make it evident to each class in society where its interests are, we are likely to have, in a comparatively short time in the future, less of a conflict between the rich and the poor than now, but more a strife of the different industrial interests one against the other, —the agriculturalists seeking their advantage as against the manufacturers, the merchants theirs as against the transportation companies—and employer and workman may often find it to their advantage to contend together against other industrial classes rather than against one another. But, however this may be, each class will feel that it is justly treated, and can act openly for its interests as it sees them. Thus the industrial interests of all will be furthered.

Mr. Bryce makes a classification of the American people that is very suggestive in this connection, though we should not expect to see political parties grouped altogether in the same way. His groups are substantially as follows: (1) farmers; (2) shopkeepers and small manufacturers; (3) workingmen; (4) ignorant poor and tramps; (5) capitalists; (6) professional men (lawyers, physicians, preachers); (7) men of letters (including teachers).

The methods that have been proposed to secure this proportional representation are various. One method has been proved by experience in Switzerland to be entirely practicable, and this is the method formally approved by the American Proportional Representation League. In broad outlines the system is as follows: Any number of persons may associate themselves together into a political party for the nomination of officers. If they can secure the requisite number of signatures to make their nominations, the state will print their tickets at its own expense. The candidates are elected, not in separate districts, but in groups on a general ticket, each party nominating if it wishes to do so as

many candidates as there are places to be filled. The total list vote cast divided by the number of candidates to be elected will give the number that is fairly entitled to a candidate. The votes are first counted for the political parties, and to each political party are then assigned candidates in proportion to the votes that it has cast. It having thus been ascertained how many candidates shall be given to each party, within the parties themselves the candidates are selected by taking those in each party that have received the highest number of votes. For example, if ten candidates are to be selected and ten thousand party votes were cast, divided so that one party received 4000 votes, the second 3000, the third 2000, and the fourth 1000, the candidates elected would be four from the first party, three from the second, two from the third, and one from the fourth; whereas under our present system of election on general tickets all ten candidates would be selected by the first party, casting 4000 votes.

This system in its main lines has been shown, as has been said, to be practicable and simple. Four cantons of Switzerland have already accepted it. It is under discussion in two or three more, and some of the largest cities like Berne have introduced the system in their municipal elections.

The objections to the system, of course, are many.

1. Our political theorists frequently say that this will give us a system of class government, and that no democracy should recognize classes, that democracy implies equality and fraternity. However this may be from the standpoint of sentiment, in fact we do have classes whose interests are more or less antagonistic, and the harmony of interests can doubtless be best secured not by closing our eyes to the facts and attempting to let the stronger class, whether in the majority or the minority, hoodwink the weaker, but rather by openly recognizing facts and, by a fair system of representation, placing each class in a position to show clearly to

the people what its interests are, and what compromise will do most good to the state.

2. It is urged that under this system any group of fanatics could secure representation in our legislative bodies and thereby waste the time and energy of the legislators in promoting impracticable schemes. It is doubtless true that our reformers, many of whom are fanatical, would under this system secure representation. But it is also true that most of our fanatical reformers are high-minded, conscientious men, disposed to act unselfishly for what they believe to be good. Possibly the tone of our legislatures would not be lowered by the advocacy, at times, of even really unpractical schemes on moral grounds. The time so employed would probably be well spent. At any rate, whether well spent or not, if enough fanatics unite upon any one subject to secure a representative in our legislature, they certainly have a right to demand to be heard. And there are few public movements that secure the support of a group of our citizens so large as that, which have not suggestions to make that, while they may not be adopted in full, will yet be of use in modifying our legislation. We must not forget that the greatest political reforms have been led by those who were at first considered fanatics.

3. From the practical side it is often urged that this system would deprive us of any majority parties on which we could lay the responsibility for legislation passed, and that, further, our legislation would then have to be the result of compromise and bargain between different minority parties, and that it would often be true that a small party could hold the balance of power and either block legislation or force dishonorable trades. It would probably not be a serious misfortune to the state if legislation, instead of being forced through under the party whip, often at the dictation of one party leader, should have to be the result of compromise between different parties with conflicting interests. It would probably not be a misfortune to the state if many

measures now forced through under caucus action or secretly should fail entirely. It doubtless would be true that at times a small party holding the balance of power would be able to make trades with others in order to secure the passage of its own favorite measures. It would, however, be true that bargains of that kind could not well be secretly made, with many parties watching, and at any rate it would probably occur not much more often than now. Still, some trouble of this kind has been felt in Switzerland. However, the experience in Switzerland has shown that there is no serious danger of a very great multiplication of parties. It is certainly ordinarily true that not more than from six to ten candidates will be elected on one ticket, and in consequence there would certainly be no party that would represent less than ten per cent of the voters. Fifteen per cent in Neuchatel must be secured to get any member.

It may be permitted, too, to mention briefly some of the direct benefits flowing from the proportional system.

As representatives are elected in groups, a change in public opinion regarding party policy, while lessening the number of representatives of that party would still leave in public life the strongest men. We could thence secure longer tenure of office, in the main, with a higher type of men.

The certainty of success in securing at least one candidate if the effort were made, would encourage men of independent tendencies to take a more active part in directing the policy of their party. Unless they were granted a hearing and representation within the party, they could secure success by bolting. Instead of producing weakness in our parties, this would probably prove a source of strength, party leaders being more conciliatory. This breaking of the tyrannical power of the party machine and the certainty of personal representation has shown itself in Switzerland by an increase in the number of votes cast, showing greater interest in political matters. The increased power of the

individual leads to more careful study of the issues of the day—hence to sounder political judgment.

Our best men are often deterred from entering politics now, because they are unwilling to submit to the dictation of party leaders, or to put themselves under obligations to these leaders. Under the proportional system this would not be necessary, and better candidates could often be persuaded to run for office. The gerrymander would be abolished, as Professor Commons showed in the *ANNALS*.*

No mere repressive law against corruption of the voters can be so effective as one that takes away motives for bribery. No other plan has been devised that renders bribery so useless to both briber and voter as does this. The party leader knowing ordinarily that he cannot, by any amount of bribery, secure a working majority but only a few additional votes, will not incur the trouble, expense, and risk of bribery; while the voter, seeing more clearly his own interest in the election, is unwilling to sell his vote. A large proportion of our vote-sellers have no knowledge regarding the political issues of the day nor interest in them. Their vote is a source of revenue, and they look little farther. With parties formed on class lines and the voter feeling the issue at stake, the vote would not be for sale. Even now when the issue is clear and important, as in war days, votes are not for sale. Proportional representation would regularly and clearly define the issues and give every voter an interest in them.

If the system were to be adopted in our country it would beyond question be wise to introduce it at first in local elections. The unsolved problem of our city boards of aldermen might well be attacked by this system. The interests of those wishing good schools, or clean streets, or strict enforcement of excise laws, as well as of those wishing for open saloons, free franchises for street railways, or blackmail by the police, could then be represented by at

* "Proportional Representation," *ANNALS*, Vol. ii, March, 1892.

least one or two voices; and it is but fair that each class—the ones that most of us call bad as well as the good—should be heard.

Finally, proportional representation is the only system that is in accord with our democratic institutions. Under our present plurality system we have in fact an oligarchy. Democracy with manhood suffrage does not mean a government by the rich, or the shrewd, or the intelligent, or even the moral classes. It is a government by the people as they are—rich, poor, educated, ignorant, prejudiced, fair-minded. It may not be the best form of government for us, though I believe that it is; but at any rate it is the form that we pretend to have, and we ought at least either to carry it out, or else openly to change it for a better.

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